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## VI.—THE WORK OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his most characteristic essays Matthew Arnold has discussed the literary influence of academies. He reminds us that "In the bulk of the intellectual work of a nation which has no centre, no intellectual metropolis like an academy . . . there is observable a *note of provinciality*." This note of provinciality, he further says, is due to one or both of two causes: (1) To remoteness from a "centre of correct information;" and (2) to remoteness from a "centre of correct taste." Remoteness from a centre of correct information gives rise to provinciality of ideas; while remoteness from a centre of correct taste gives rise to provinciality of style. Arnold declares, for example, that Addison, though free from provinciality of style, is yet provincial in his ideas. He is not a moralist of the first rank, says Arnold, because "he has not the best ideas attainable in or about his time, and which were, so to speak, in the air then, to be seized by the finest spirits. . . . He is provincial by his matter, though not by his manner."

I have quoted these words of Arnold because they seem to me to express with admirable clearness the purpose of our Association. That purpose is by united effort to establish a centre of correct information for the settlement of questions relating to the Modern Languages and Literatures. We wish to make accessible to every advanced student and to every teacher of the Modern Languages "the best ideas attainable in or about his time." When Sir Isaac Newton was asked why he was able to see into the secrets of nature farther than other men, his reply was, "Because I stand on the shoulders

<sup>1</sup>Address of the President of the Central Division of the Modern Language Association of America, at its Annual Meeting held at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb., December, 1898.

of giants." And so the teacher of Modern Languages who does not stand upon the heights already reached, who does not utilize the results already attained, not only misses the Pisgah sights but dooms his own labor to the realm of the provincial and the fragmentary.

Of course books may do much, but I question whether any number of books can create the atmosphere that one finds at an association of representative scholars. The various points of view represented, the unexpected suggestions, the stimulus of personal contact and intercourse, the assaults upon positions long considered unassailable, the very titles of papers read, will often do more toward lifting the teacher out of the routine of thought or method into which he may have drifted, than any book or books can possibly do.

Teachers and students of language are in constant danger not only of working in grooves, but of announcing discoveries that are not discoveries. The editors of philological, educational, and literary journals all agree that the articles that fill their waste-baskets and "go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire," owe their rejection not to lack of conscientious and prolonged effort on the part of those who write them, but to lack of enlightened up-to-date effort. Every department of Modern Language study is to-day occupied by busy workers, the results of whose labors must be known, at least in part, to every teacher or student who aspires to eminence or influence in his work.

Let us take a practical illustration. I do not believe that our country has ever had a more devoted toiler in philology than Noah Webster; but, largely on account of conditions unalterable by him, he was an isolated toiler. He died in 1843, and all his etymological work had at once to be revised, for it was hopelessly behind the times. He had access to no "centre of correct information;" he was not in touch with "the best ideas attainable in or about his time."

Where can you find a better illustration of the note of provinciality than in Webster's labored and conscientious

efforts to explain the linguistic difficulties that confronted him? He noticed, for example, that his New England countrymen said *kiow* instead of *cow* and he declared, after due meditation on the subject, that the New England people owed this peculiarity of pronunciation to "the nature of their government and the distribution of their property." With this clue can you divine his meaning? It is in substance as follows: The country people of New England have few slaves, few large fortunes, and few social distinctions. Hence they have a "drawling nasal tone" instead of that air of authority found among those who own slaves and pride themselves on social distinctions. Thus in the South the master says to his slave, "Milk the cow;" but in New England they advise: "Will you please milk the kiow?"

Now I do not censure Webster for not belonging to the Modern Language Association of America, but I use his revered name as an illustration of the misdirection and futility that so often attend the best laid efforts of those who have access to no centre of correct information and who are therefore not in touch with the best ideas attainable in or about their time. Webster lived at a time when Jacob Grimm had laid securely the foundation of historical grammar, when August Wilhelm von Schlegel had laid the foundation of Sanskrit philology, when Franz Bopp had laid the foundation of comparative grammar, and when August Friedrich Pott had laid the foundation of scientific phonetics; but, like Gallio, Noah Webster "cared for none of those things."

Arnold tells us again that the provincial spirit invariably "exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard by which to try them." Hence we find Webster declaring that he has pushed his philological inquiries "probably much farther than any other man," and has made discoveries that will "render it necessary to revise all the lexicons—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—now used as classical books." But it need not be further emphasized that in a department so broad,

so varied, so filled with illustrious names, as that of language study, isolated effort means futile effort.

Now the Modern Language Association of America stands for united effort. It seeks by annual meetings and by publications to organize the agencies and to elevate the standard of Modern Language study in every State and County of the Union. It endeavors to educate public sentiment in regard to the Modern Languages so that the note of provinciality shall no longer characterize either the investigations of American scholars or the methods of American teachers. This Association does not believe that the profoundest scholar or the most successful investigator is always the best teacher; but it does believe that without the atmosphere of investigation, without the spirit of research, teaching becomes formal and learning fragmentary.

That there is need for an Association of this sort, will be apparent to any one who will review, even cursorily, the trend of opinion in regard to the Modern Languages. It is astonishing to see how slow these languages and literatures have been in coming to their own. Every inch of ground has been contested. There was not a professorship of Modern Languages in this country until 1816, when the Smith Professorship of French and Spanish was founded at Harvard. There was no regularly appointed tutor of French at Harvard before 1806, though Harvard was founded during the lifetime of Corneille, Molière, and La Fontaine; nor was there an official teacher of German before 1830. The Modern Languages, says an honored President of the Modern Language Association of America, James Russell Lowell, were not deemed worthy to be taught except "as a social accomplishment or as a commercial subsidiary." It has been shown by statistical investigation that, in the Southern States of the Union, the study of the Modern Languages did not find a recognized place in higher education until after 1870; that before 1860 there were, in the South, probably not more than three Modern Language professorships.

English, on the whole, has fared, I think, worst of all. "It was in 1874," says President Eliot, "that we established, for the first time, an examination in English for admission to Harvard College." It is well known that in the Grammar Schools of England, from the foundation of Winchester in Chaucer's time to the present day, Latin has been the dominant subject of study, and in many cases the only subject. The first book ever used for the formal teaching of English grammar was Dr. John Colet's *Introduction to Lily's Latin Grammar* written in the beginning of Henry VIII's reign. This book remained the standard of grammatical reference in England for over two hundred years. Now the significant fact is that neither Colet's *Introduction* nor any book emanating from it was properly an English grammar at all. They were translations of Latin grammars and were designed to introduce the pupil to the study of Latin, not to the study of English. Colet himself calls his book "An Introducyon of the Partes of Spekyng for Chyldren and Yonge Begynners in to Latyn Speche," and there is no reason to believe that he ever anticipated the use of his *Introduction* except as an elementary text-book of Latin.

It hardly needs to be said that the teaching of English out of books like these was simply Procrustean, because the grammatical rules of a highly inflected ancient language were foisted upon a Modern Language that had been steadily dropping its inflections from the dawn of its historical period. English grammar was defined as an art, but it was taught as a science; for there was no attempt made to give practice in composition or to increase the range and fulness of the pupil's power of interpretation. And it is only in recent years that English grammars have begun in some measure to throw off the incubus of a servile adherence to Latin grammars, and to claim the right of a separate and independent language to a separate and independent treatment.

And yet one becomes somewhat reconciled to the neglect of English grammar in Renaissance times when one considers the

remarkable treatment that other Modern Languages received at the hands of the Englishmen of that day who essayed to write popular text-books. One of the French grammars most widely used in England during the sixteenth century was prepared by John Palsgrave, a native Londoner. Palsgrave, it seems, had made some original investigations in French phonetics, and had arrived at the conclusion that the French people covet harmony in their speech above all else. By way of simplifying the matter to young and tender minds Palsgrave thus explains how the Parisians attain their harmony of speech: "To be armonyous in theyr speking, they use one thyng which none other nation dothe, but onely they. That is to say, they make a maner of modulation inwardly; for they forme certayne of theyr vowelles in theyr brest and suffre not the sounde of them to passe out by the mouthe, but to assende from the brest straight up to the palate of the mouth, and so by reflection yssueth the sounde of them by the nose." Palsgrave taught French to Henry VIII's sister. She died early.

The vicissitudes of the Modern Languages in their struggle for recognition by the side of the Classical Languages form an interesting and in certain aspects a unique chapter in the history of education. It is held by all writers on the origin of grammatical study that grammars were first written for the purpose of expounding to later generations some great literary masterpiece that had made its language the norm for the period. Grammars were at first, therefore, merely expository, not at all regulative. Thus if a Shakespeare or a Dante should happen to be born among the negroes of the South, the negro dialect would soon have its grammar so as to make possible to a wider circle the interpretation of its dramatic or epic literature. Literature naturally precedes grammar, or rather grammar follows literature, for grammar is the key by which we unlock the treasures of literature. And yet when it could no longer be denied that masterpieces of prose and poetry *had* been produced in the Modern Lan-

guages,—when Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Luther, Molière, and Cervantes had spoken into existence a sovereign literature, responsive to the newer needs and pulsing with the newer life of their centuries, the language of this literature was deemed unworthy of scientific study. The literature had come, but the language in which this literature lay incarnate had to plead for centuries for even the most meager recognition, and still pleads for adequate recognition.

The most significant lines, in my judgment, that Ben Jonson ever wrote, are those in which he confidently pits the work of his dead friend, William Shakespeare, against the sum

“Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come;”

and yet a reading of Ben Jonson's *English Grammar* demonstrates that his appreciation of the height to which English literature had risen in Shakespeare had yet left him an unbeliever in the corresponding worth and dignity of the language that Shakespeare used. Indeed the only writer throughout the whole of the sixteenth century, so far as I know, who dared to raise his voice in behalf of English as against Latin was the now forgotten Richard Mulcaster (died 1611). “I love Rome,” said he, “but London better; I favor Italie, but England more; I honor the Latin, but I worship the English.”

I shall not enter into any discussion of the relative merits of the Ancient and the Modern Languages. The task is one of peculiar difficulty, and, like the fox in the fable, I find some tracks leading into this den, but none leading out. The Société de Linguistique de Paris, founded in 1865, wisely forbids in its constitution the reading of any paper devoted either to the origin of language or to the creation of a universal language. We would do well to incorporate these inhibitions into our constitution (though I believe we have never violated either of them), and to add a malediction on him who should essay to hold the balance between the



Modern Languages and the Classical. This Association does not seek to depreciate any language, far less the almost sacred tongues of Homer and Vergil.

But I wish to touch upon a certain attitude of mind toward the Modern Languages that has served, I think, to retard a proper estimate of their structural peculiarities. These languages differ most obviously from the Classical Languages in retaining but a small number of their earlier inflections. Now comparative philologists habitually speak of the loss of inflections as a sign of decay, a sort of autumnal stage through which some languages pass. The Modern Languages, therefore, are but worn-out relics of their originals, whether these originals be the Classical or the earlier Teutonic tongues. The throwing off of inflections is regarded as a form of degeneration and corruption. Phonetic change is called phonetic decay. The earliest known form of a language is taken not only as the starting point, but as the standard. Accordingly, such poor languages as French, English, and Danish, which have lost most of their patrimony of inflections, are looked upon as prodigal sons, who have wasted their substance with riotous living.

Ampère, in his recent *Histoire de la langue française* (2nd ed.), speaks of the processes necessary "to repair the ruins," "to remedy the disease," "to avoid the confusion," caused by the dropping of inflections. Schleicher, whose influence has dominated Indo-Germanic philology since the publication of his famous *Compendium* in 1861, declares that the languages spoken now are "senile relics;" that in historical times "all languages move only downhill." Schleicher was doubtless led to these extreme views from two causes: first, from the emphasis that he placed on the Indo-Germanic parent language, or "Ursprache" (he being the first to introduce the term); and, second, from his conception of language as an organism, not unlike a tree. His estimate of a language, therefore, was purely the morphological estimate. He even instances modern English as an example of "how rapidly the

language of a nation, important both in history and literature, can sink." One of his expressions deserves especial notice, for in it Schleicher seems to me to reduce his own theory perilously near to absurdity: he speaks of "the subjugation of language through the evolution of the mind."

A few dissident voices, but only a few, have from time to time been raised. Madvig, the Danish grammarian of Latin, affirms that the analytic languages are just as good as the synthetic, because thought can be expressed in both with equal clearness. Jacob Grimm maintained fifty years ago that the Modern Languages, though they have fewer means than the ancient, are more effective. The most decided statements on this subject have been made by two scholars in the last decade,—Kräuter (in Herrig's *Archiv*, 57, 204) and Jespersen (in his *Progress in Language*, p. 14). Kräuter asserts that "The dying out of forms and sounds is looked upon by the etymologists with painful feelings: but no unprejudiced judge will be able to see in it anything but a progressive victory over lifeless material. Among several tools performing equally good work, that is the best which is simplest and most handy." Jespersen takes still more advanced ground: "The fewer and shorter the forms, the better; the analytic structure of modern European languages is so far from being a drawback to them that it gives them an unimpeachable superiority over the earlier stages of the same languages. The so-called full and rich forms of the ancient languages are not a beauty but a deformity."

An American scholar, widely known as an appreciative commentator on Shakespeare and as a popular writer on the use and abuse of words, has called English "a grammarless tongue;" but English is not a grammarless tongue, nor is even Danish a grammarless tongue. Their grammar is not the grammar of elaborate inflections nor of varied verb-forms, but it is none the less grammar. Every falling away of inflection, provided the linguistic consciousness does not take a different turn, is followed at once, or rather is preceded, by

some equivalent syntactical formation. Language maintains its old function of expressing thought. As the mood-endings are dropped, the auxiliaries take their places; as the case-endings weaken, the prepositions step into the breach; and if the nouns lose their terminal distinctions of subject and object, the order in which these nouns stand in the sentence proclaims their relations as plainly as if they wore the frontlets of inflection. There is no loss,—there is only replacement. Grammatical distinctions have come to be differently expressed; but tense, mood, case, subject and predicate are still there, because these things are of the very essence of thought itself. Grammatical facts are mental facts, because they express logical processes.

The insistence on these simple truths is the more important because the opinion is almost universal that the analysis of the Modern Languages does not furnish the mental discipline offered by the Classical Languages. I believe, on the contrary, that while Latin and Greek make heavier demands on the memory, the uninflected languages make the stronger appeal to the reasoning faculties. You can *see* syntactical distinctions in the ancient languages, because each word wears the inflectional badge of its function; but in the Modern Languages you must *feel* these distinctions. It is for this reason that I have always considered the study of Old English as valuable not merely as an historical introduction to the structure of Modern English, but as a logical introduction through patent forms to the implied relations of our uninflected speech.

It is only in this sense that the words of Whitney find their justification. "Give me a man," says he, "who can with full intelligence take to pieces an English sentence—brief, and not too complicated even—and I will welcome him as better prepared for further study in other languages than if he had read both Cæsar and Vergil, and could parse them in the routine style in which they are so often parsed."

It is thus seen that the claims of the Modern Languages and Literatures have met with determined opposition; but their course has been steadily onward. Not a backward step has been taken, and no position once gained has ever been lost. It was only after vigorous fighting that science was given a place in the schools, the champions of science being usually the champions also of the Modern Languages. To a reader of Combe's famous lectures on *Popular Education*, delivered in 1833 before the Edinburgh Philosophical Association, there is much significance in the fact that during the second meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, a committee from the Society of Naturalists for the Eastern United States presented the following resolution: "That the Society of Naturalists of the Eastern United States, recognizing the great importance of a thorough knowledge of Modern Languages, especially of German and French, to students of Natural History, regard it as a hopeful sign that a Conference of Professors in this department is now assembled at Columbia College, and hereby express their hearty sympathy with this work."

But science was not the only ally that came to the aid of the Modern Languages; a little later, the study of history was extended so as to include modern movements, modern social developments and sociological questions. Both of these advances, the scientific and the historical, have been of great service in accelerating the recognition of the Modern Languages; for it is beginning to be perceived that these languages and literatures are a part of modern history; that they alone bind nation with nation, and link the present with the past; that they furnish worthy material for most rigid scientific study; and that so far from diminishing the interest in the Ancient Languages, they add to that interest by furnishing an invaluable basis for comparative study. They exhibit the principles of linguistic growth, of phonetic change, of the influence of race and environment on idiom and vocabulary,

in a way that makes their study indispensable to the investigator in any department of language.

These are some of the considerations that make the student of the Modern Languages enthusiastic in his work and justly hopeful of the future.

I have stated what I conceive to be the central purpose of our Association, and have enumerated some of the difficulties and misconceptions that the Modern Languages have had to contend with in their struggle for academic recognition. It remains now to trace briefly some of the movements that facilitated the founding of the Modern Language Association of America, and some of the results that it has already attained; for, though it is true that our Association finds the reason of its existence in the problems that still confront it, it finds no less surely the warrant of its perpetuity in the results that lie behind it. Few if any language associations have better vindicated the wisdom of their founders or attested the timeliness of their organization.

The Modern Language Association of America is not of a fortuitous birth, but is the product and continuation of forces that have found increasing expression from the very beginning of our century. The centuries that are gone have had their renaissance, their new learning; and this century, too, has ushered in a new learning, but it is the learning stored in the Modern Languages not in the tongues of Greece and Rome.

In the earlier part of the century, the influence of Walter Scott's writings was an important factor in the formation of numerous Scotch clubs and societies organized for the purpose of publishing the historical and literary material which, till his time, had been almost totally neglected. One of these clubs, the Bannatyne, Scott himself founded, and became its first president. The publications of these societies marked a new era in the efforts made in English-speaking countries toward the rescue of the materials on which the study of our vernacular must be based. Attention was thus

called afresh to the vast stores of *inedita* that lay idle in the libraries of Scotland and England. In 1842 the English Philological Society was organized, and fifteen years later began to agitate the publication of a great dictionary that should trace the life-history of every word that forms, or has ever formed, a part of the English vocabulary. The appearance in 1884 of the first instalment of this dictionary, known as *The Oxford Dictionary*, marks an epoch in English. Such a work as this, however, would have been impossible had it not been for the beneficent activity of Dr. Furnivall, who in 1864 organized the now famous Early English Text Society. The publications of this society alone have not only made possible the scientific study of Old English and Middle English, but have stimulated a new interest in the whole subject of dialectology. "Members of the Society will learn with pleasure," said Dr. Furnivall, in 1890, "that its example has been followed, not only by the Old French Text Society which has done such admirable work under its founders, Professors Paul Meyer and Gaston Paris, but also by the Early Russian Text Society, which was set on foot in 1877, and has since issued many excellent editions of old *ms.* Chronicles, etc." It is gratifying to know that amid all the discouragements incident to the work of the Early English Text Society, Dr. Furnivall has found "aid and cheer" in the sympathy and ready help extended by scholars in the United States.

In 1869 the American Philological Association was organized, the influence of which has been felt not only in the Classical and Oriental Languages, but in the Modern Languages as well. Its annual meetings are held during the summer months, and its membership is now about four hundred and twenty-five. In 1876 the Johns Hopkins University was founded and the scientific study of the Modern Languages first introduced. It would be hard to overestimate the influence of this University in giving full academic recognition to the Modern Languages, in stimulating original

research by basing it on purely scientific methods, and in bringing about a more enlightened attitude toward these languages in other centres of learning. In 1880 the *American Journal of Philology* was founded, and Professor Gildersleeve became its editor. It is open to original communications in all departments of philology,—classical, comparative, oriental, and modern. The name of its editor is a sufficient guarantee of the standard of scholarship that it has maintained; but I wish to add a personal tribute to the suggestiveness of its articles and reviews to the student of the Modern Languages. To the domain of English syntax, at least, the *American Journal of Philology* has made permanent contributions.

But a growing need had long been felt for some organization devoted exclusively to the Modern Languages and Literatures, and in December of 1883, at Columbia College, New York, the first meeting of the Modern Language Association of America was held. To no two men does the Association owe so much as to Professor A. M. Elliott, who laid its foundation and shaped its policy, and to Professor James W. Bright, whose loyalty to its interests and whose exacting labors in its behalf have made every member his debtor. The Association has grown steadily from the beginning and now numbers about five hundred members. The list printed after the second meeting of the Association, December, 1884, shows an enrolment of one hundred and thirty-five, twenty per cent. of whom represent states lying west of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. These states now furnish forty per cent. of the total membership, having just doubled their quota.

It was evident, therefore, almost from the start, that the formation of a Western, or Central, Section or Division would eventually become necessary. The meetings were very naturally held almost exclusively in the East. Distance and consequent expense thus made it impracticable for the members in the Western and Middle States, as well as for those along the southern course of the Mississippi, to attend

as regularly as they desired. They received the *Publications* of the Association, but were deprived of the privilege of personal acquaintance and the mutual exchange of ideas enjoyed at the annual meetings. The initiative in the new movement was taken by representatives of the Universities of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa; and in December of 1895, at the University of Chicago, the first meeting of our Central Division was held.

Such has been the history of the Modern Language Association of America. I wish that it were in my power to portray its influence as clearly as I recognize it and as strongly as I feel it. It found the Modern Language forces wholly unorganized; there was no centre, no coöperation; teachers in adjoining States or in the same State knew nothing of one another's methods except by the most casual intercourse. Able teachers were, of course, found here and there, but Modern Language instruction was not receiving, nor seemed likely to receive, the academic recognition that it merited; and scientific research, with a few exceptions, was practically unknown.

During the fifteen years of its existence, it has united and consolidated the Modern Language forces into an agency whose influence is recognized as paramount by the leading Colleges and Universities of thirty-nine States. It has not only caused the formation of smaller associations of like character in the different States, but has led to the organization of the first American Dialect Society. This Society issues independent publications, or *Notes*, and is gathering material for a compendious American Dialect Dictionary, similar to the *English Dialect Dictionary* now in process of publication.

Not only have graduate courses in the Modern Languages been introduced into many institutions since 1883, but fundamental courses also have been added, such as those in Old English, Middle English, Old Norse, Old High German, and Old French. In 1875 there were only twenty-three



Colleges and Universities in the United States in which any instruction was given in Old English. The subject was not taught at such institutions as the University of Michigan, Dartmouth, Princeton, and Vanderbilt. To-day a college giving no instruction in Old English or in Chaucer is the exception rather than the rule. In 1887, as a further indication of the progress that the Modern Language sentiment had made, Harvard led the way in placing advanced admission examinations in French and German upon a level with those in Latin, Greek, Mathematics, and all other subjects. For admission to Harvard, examinations must be passed in at least two advanced subjects. "These advanced subjects," said President Eliot, addressing the Modern Language Association in December, 1889,—“used to be with us, as in most other American institutions, only Latin, Greek, and Mathematics; but . . . now any candidate for admission may present as advanced subjects, French and German, if he chooses . . . and I submit to you that this is a considerable step towards the introduction of advanced teaching of these languages into the secondary schools.”

It is only in the last fifteen years that the latest results of French and German investigation have begun to find widespread and appreciative welcome in the American centres of Modern Language instruction; and more gratifying still has been the reciprocal influence of American thought. The *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* not only take their place in the libraries of foreign Universities as aids in advanced investigation, but prove that the day has come when the organized efforts of our own country in behalf of the Modern Languages are beginning for the first time to receive accredited recognition wherever these languages are studied.

We make our appeal for coöperation, therefore, to all who are interested in the Modern Languages, to the teacher in the Secondary School as well as to the professor in the College and University. Ours is a common cause and we press

toward a common goal. The good of the one is the good of the other, for the triumph of the one is the triumph of the other. Let us take with us into the discussions in which we are about to engage, and into the class-rooms that we have left for a season, these brave words of Milton: "The light which we have gained, was given us not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge."

C. ALPHONSO SMITH.